

Virginia Department of Historic Resources

PIF Resource Information Sheet

This information sheet is designed to provide the Virginia Department of Historic Resources with the necessary data to be able to evaluate the significance of the proposed district for possible listing in the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places. This is not a formal nomination, but a necessary step in determining whether or not the district could be considered eligible for listing. Please take the time to fill in as many fields as possible. A greater number of completed fields will result in a more timely and accurate assessment. Staff assistance is available to answer any questions you have in regards to this form.

General Property Information		For Staff Use Only DHR ID #: 108-5607	
District Name(s): <u>Mechanicsville Historic District</u>			
District or Selected Building Date(s): <u>1850-1960</u>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Circa <input type="checkbox"/> Pre <input type="checkbox"/> Post Open to the Public? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Main District Streets and/or Routes: <u>High Street, Monroe Street, Upper Street, Ridge Street and Floyd Street</u>		City: <u>Danville</u> Zip: <u>24541</u>	
County or Ind. City: <u>Danville (ind. City)</u>		USGS Quad(s): <u>Danville</u>	
Physical Character of General Surroundings			
Acreage: <u>14.346</u> Setting (choose one): <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> City <input type="checkbox"/> Urban <input type="checkbox"/> Town <input type="checkbox"/> Suburban <input type="checkbox"/> Rural <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation Corridor Site Description Notes/Notable Landscape Features/Streetscapes: The geographic and physical boundaries of the Mechanicsville Historic District are Ridge Street on the southwest and High Street on the southeast. As the name suggests, Ridge Street follows an east-to-west ridge that forms the high point of land in the southern part of the city. Early residential and commercial development was north of Ridge Street, on the slope down to the river. High Street is also situated on elevated ground. The land southeast of High Street immediately drops off and slopes down a hill to Main Street. In contrast to the residential character of the Mechanicsville Historic District, the area between High Street and Main Street is filled with old tobacco factories and warehouses as well as commercial and public buildings. The northwest and northeast boundaries of the district are determined by the change in architectural context. The resources included within the district are components in cohesive historic streetscapes that contribute to the integrity of the district as a distinguishable entity. In contrast, the architectural integrity of the resources in the areas excluded from the district has been compromised by major alterations, demolition, and infilling with commercial and residential buildings and parking lots. The area of the proposed district is characterized primarily by residential lots with standard landscaping, public sidewalks and paved streets with curbs and gutters.			
Ownership Categories: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public-Local <input type="checkbox"/> Public-State <input type="checkbox"/> Public-Federal			
General District Information			
What were the historical uses of the resources within the proposed district? Examples include: Dwelling, Store, Barn, etc...			
<u>Single-family dwellings, multiple-family dwellings, churches, community center, social hall</u>			
What are the current uses? (if other than the historical use)		<u>Single-family dwellings, multiple-family dwellings, churches, social hall, vacant</u>	
Architectural styles or elements of buildings within the proposed district:		<u>Romanesque Revival, Classical Revival, Italianate, vernacular</u>	
Architects, builders, or original owners of buildings within the proposed district:		<u>Heard & Chesterman</u>	
Are there any known threats to this district? <u>Neglect</u>			

General Description of District: (Please describe building patterns, types, features, and the general architectural quality of the proposed district. Include prominent materials and noteworthy building details within the district and a general setting and/or streetscape description.)

The geographic and physical boundaries of the Mechanicsville Historic District are Ridge Street on the southwest and High Street on the southeast. As the name suggests, Ridge Street follows an east-to-west ridge that forms the high point of land in the southern part of the city. Early residential and commercial development was north of Ridge Street, on the slope down to the river. High Street is also situated on elevated ground. The land southeast of High Street immediately drops off and slopes down a hill to Main Street. In contrast to the residential character of the Mechanicsville Historic District, the area between High Street and Main Street is filled with old tobacco factories and warehouses as well as commercial and public buildings. The northwest and northeast boundaries of the district are determined by the change in architectural context. The resources included within the district are components in cohesive historic streetscapes that contribute to the integrity of the district as a distinguishable entity. In contrast, the architectural integrity of the resources in the areas excluded from the district has been compromised by major alterations, demolition, and infilling with commercial and residential buildings and parking lots.

Floyd Street:

The streetscape along the southwest side of Floyd Street is unique for its row of seven detached brick row houses situated at 301-313 Floyd Street. The interiors preserve their original woodwork, including wood mantels in each room on both the first and second floors. Brick row houses are unusual in Danville, where the majority of row houses were built of wood-frame construction. Built between 1910 and 1915, the dwellings may have been constructed of brick salvaged from the tobacco prizery that formerly stood on the lot. This practice of salvaging brick from former tobacco buildings appears to have occurred again further down the street, at 343 (demolished) and 347 Floyd Street (Wuellner et al. 1992), where a pair of unusual semi-detached brick dwellings are situated. One of only two brick tobacco buildings that survive within the Mechanicsville Historic District is situated on Floyd Street. The George A. Lee & Co. (M & M Furniture) was built between 1887 and 1889 as a tobacco warehouse but later housed a tobacco prizery, mattress factory, and finally a furniture warehouse. Adjacent to the tobacco warehouse are two wood-frame cottage residences characteristic of dwellings constructed for mill workers in Danville from the late 1880s through the early twentieth century. On the southeast corner of Floyd and Monroe streets, a two-story, concrete-block Masonic Lodge was constructed in 1994 as the new home of the Elk Lodge on High Street. The scale of the building is in keeping with the domestic character of the neighborhood, and its construction reflects the survival of traditional African-American social activities in the ethnically mixed Mechanicsville community. A row of four semidetached Italianate-style residences, at 401, 405, 407, and 411 Floyd Street, are associated architecturally with the more elaborate late-nineteenth-century residences along Monroe Street, including the Morton House at 543 Monroe, the Motely House at 531 Monroe (both now demolished), and the Motely House (Hughs House) at 630 Monroe. These dwellings exhibit Italianate-style details such as bracketed cornices as well as windows with decorated surrounds and molded window crowns.

High Street:

The architecture of High Street reflects the African-American heritage of Mechanicsville. The High Street Baptist Church is the focal point of the High Street streetscape. Built in 1901, the brick Romanesque Revival-style church features outstanding brickwork and an unusual split-level plan. The interior woodwork and pressed-metal ceilings are well preserved and in excellent condition (Plate 14). Further down the street, the Morning Star Elk Lodge is housed in the converted ca. 1877 Thomas & McAdams Tobacco and Cigar Factory. The early-twentieth century conversion of the factory building to an African-American fraternal lodge reflects the rise and decline of nineteenth-century industry in Mechanicsville as well as the early-twentieth century social history and ethnicity of the Mechanicsville community. Next door to the northeast, Thacker's Barber Shop is housed in a one-story brick commercial building, a rare surviving example of a commercial building in Mechanicsville.

Ridge Street:

Ridge Street was mostly occupied by working-class whites beginning around 1900-1904 when the first dwellings were built along the northeast side of the street within the district to accommodate the influx of workers. Multi-family dwellings including semidetached wood-frame dwellings and a brick six-unit apartment building occupy the northern half of the street from 330 to 342 Ridge Street. In contrast, the southern half of the street is occupied by single-family residences and a store. One of the best preserved single-family residences in the Mechanicsville Historic District is the Redd House, constructed between 1910 and 1915 at 324 Ridge Street. The Carpenter Gothic cottage features Eastlake-influenced millwork and preserves its interior woodwork, including a wood mantel and molded door and window surrounds. Although similar to other cottage residences built in the Tobacco Warehouse and Residential District in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the residence is unique within the Mechanicsville Historic District.

Next door, Modern Food Store No. 8, is a ca. 1900-1910 commercial building that recently has been renovated and a rear two-story apartment wing added. The renovation has retained the storefront, with its recessed entry flanked by display windows, and the rear apartment wing is not clearly visible from the street and does not detract from the Ridge Street streetscape.

Monroe Street:

Monroe Street developed in the 1880s and 1890s as an ethnically mixed street occupied by both white and black mill workers, tradesmen, and teachers. Both multi-family and single-family dwellings are situated along the street. Typical working-class dwellings built between 1900 and

1904 occur along the southeast side of the street near the corner of Ridge Street. Down the hill from these dwellings, the American Legion Post 29, 619 Monroe Street, is a noncontributing building in the district. Situated far from the street at the back of the lot, the contemporary concrete building is not a clearly visible element in the Monroe Street streetscape. The northwest side of Monroe Street is occupied by primarily single-family, middle-class residences but includes a mid-1960s brick ranch dwelling and a ca. 1970 brick apartment building which are noncontributing buildings in the recommended Mechanicsville Historic District. They were built during the period of redevelopment of the western portion of Mechanicsville by the Federal Housing Redevelopment Project. Both buildings are one story in height and are situated along the same setback line as the other residences along Monroe Street, in keeping with the domestic scale of the neighborhood. The Motely House (Hughes House) at 630 Monroe Street is situated between the two noncontributing brick buildings mentioned above. The Italianate-style residence is architecturally related to the Morton House at 543 Monroe (now demolished), which may have been built by the same builder. Both dwellings have similar interior woodwork and feature almost identical plasterwork boss reliefs ornamenting their entrance hall ceilings. The Motely House (Hughes House) was owned by the Motely family for five generations (Hughes 1993). Of African descent, members of the Motely family were brick masons and teachers.

Upper Street

The east end of the northwest side of Upper Street contains two historic resources that are significant for their association with the religious and social practices of the white residents in this ethnically-mixed neighborhood. Sledd memorial Baptist Church – South, located at 608 Upper Street, was constructed in 1925 to replace the earlier (ca. 1900) church structure on the same lot (Sanborn 1904, 1920-1951). The church was designed in the Classical Revival style by the firm of Heard & Chesterman and features a classical portico with pedimented gable and arched windows with keystones. The former Wesley Community House stands at 626 Upper Street. This two-story brick building with hipped roof and was originally constructed ca. 1900 as a tenement house and was labeled as a “club house” as early as 1910. By the 1950s, the building was known as the Wesley Community House where an after-school program for children was operated by the Methodist Church (Sanborn 1904, 1910, 1920-1951; Grant 2013). While the remaining structures along Upper Street date to the 1963 federal redevelopment project, this area historically developed as part of the Mechanicsville neighborhood and these two structures retain that association.

Significance Statement: Briefly note any significant events, personages, and/or families associated with the proposed district. It is not necessary to attach lengthy articles or genealogies to this form. Please list all sources of information. Normally, only information contained on this form is forwarded to the State Review Board.

Statement of Significance

The Mechanicsville Historic District is recommended eligible for the National Register under Criterion C, as a historic district "that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association," and that embodies "the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction," and "that represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction" (U.S. Department of the Interior 199 1: 37). Contributing components within the district include primarily domestic buildings as well as isolated examples of religious, social, and commercial buildings representative of the ethnically mixed, working-class neighborhood of Mechanicsville. While many of the resources inventoried within the district lack outstanding or distinguished individual merit, as elements of the larger district they contribute to the integrity of the district as a whole. The district is also recommended eligible on the local level under Criterion A for broad patterns in history as an ethnically mixed middle-class and working class neighborhood associated with commercial and industrial activities in Danville. The Mechanicsville Historic District is recommended as eligible for listing on the local level with significance in the areas of architecture, religion, ethnic heritage (African-American), industry and religion for the period 1850-1962.

The architectural resources within the Mechanicsville Historic District were built during the period of Reconstruction and Growth (1865-1917), approximately between the years 1880 and 1920. These years were a period of industrial growth in Danville, Virginia, when the cotton milling industry was established along the banks of the Dan River and working-class communities associated with the mills were developed nearby. Mechanicsville emerged in this period as a distinctive neighborhood of tradesmen, educators, skilled workmen, and laborers associated with the cotton milling industry to the north and with the nearby downtown commercial district to the east. Reminders of the prominence of the tobacco industry the 1870s survive in the district in the form of brick tobacco buildings later converted to other uses: the George A. Lee & Co.; and the Thomas & McAdams Tobacco & Cigar Factory (Morning Star Elk Lodge).

The row of detached brick row houses at 301-313 Floyd Street are rare in Danville, where most working-class housing was built of wood frame. Likewise, the pair of semidetached brick dwellings at 343 and 347 Floyd Street are unique in the district and rare in Danville, and was probably constructed of brick salvaged from former tobacco buildings situated on Floyd Street. The wide range of dwelling types extant in the district, including detached row houses, semidetached dwellings, an apartment building, and detached residences represents the varied socio-economic levels of the occupants that included both middle-class and working-class residents. The large range in style from substantial Italianate-style residences, a Romanesque Revival-style church and a Classical-Revival style church (designed by Heard & Chesterman) to Carpenter Gothic cottage residences and vernacular row houses with origins in traditional African-American forms reflects the mixed ethnicity and cultural background of the residents, making this a distinguishable and unique historic district in Danville, Virginia.

Historical Background

Early Residential Development of Mechanicsville (1850-1917)

Mechanicsville was first established during the antebellum period in the area west of the downtown commercial district. The neighborhood developed south of the canal and west of High Street, between Ridge Street on the south and Union Street on the North. The neighborhood experienced a period of growth in the 1870s and 1880s as a result of the post-war tobacco boom when residential construction occurred in the greatest concentration between Floyd and Union streets. Lots in Mechanicsville had been laid out and was under development by 1854. It appears that the area was developed by real estate speculators who acquired lots containing several parcels then sold off individual house lots. A comparison of Beers 1877 *map* with later maps indicates large lots were later subdivided and sold. The tobacco boom began to affect Mechanicsville in the late 1870s. By 1877, a tobacco factory existed on Henry Street in the western end of Mechanicsville (Beers 1877. Two large rectangular buildings on the west side of High Street between Floyd and Union streets existed by 1877 and functioned as tobacco prize-ries in 1886 (Sanborn 1886;. Prize-ries were buildings where tobacco leaves were brought to be classed by type and quality and price.

At least four additional prize-ries and a tobacco factory were constructed in Mechanicsville along Floyd and High streets within the boundary of the proposed Mechanicsville Historic District by the mid-1880s. Between 1877 and 1886 Mechanicsville developed as a mixed-use neighborhood with single and multi-family dwellings and a "negro tenement" (Sanborn 1886) intermixed with tobacco factories and prize-ries. Growth of the tobacco industry slowed in Mechanicsville after 1886 (Sanborn 1890, 1894). However, an increase in residential development from the mid-1890s through 1915 suggests the expansion of the cotton milling industry was a major factor in the growth of Mechanicsville in this period (Sanborn 1894, 1899, 1904, 1910, 1915). By 1894, new dwellings had been constructed along the side streets south of Union Street, and commercial buildings, boarding houses, and tenements existed along the north side of Union Street (Sanborn 1894). By 1904, many of the existing historic architectural resources within the Mechanicsville Historic District had been built except for the row of brick dwellings

along Floyd Street at the corner of High Street and the dwellings along Ridge Street. By 1910, several dwellings and two grocery stores had been built on Ridge Street (Sanborn 1910; By 1915, the majority of the remaining architectural resources within the historic district had been constructed (Sanborn 1915; with the exception of an early twentieth-century commercial building, a residence north of the High Street Baptist Church on High Street, and the 1925 Sledd memorial Baptist Church-South at the corner of Upper and Floyd streets.. which were built after 1915 (Sanborn 1915).

The name "Mechanicsville" suggests the type of work and social standing of the early residents. In the antebellum period, "mechanics" typically were skilled artisans or tradesmen such as barbers, blacksmiths, cabinet makers, and shoemakers (Stamp 1956:63). Mechanics generally were white non-slaveholders, though both free black and slave artisans existed. Mechanics seldom could afford to own bondsmen and hired slave assistants instead, many of whom received valued training in this way (Stamp 1956:71). Mechanics mostly were lower middle- and middle-class whites who had the resources to establish families and purchase or build their own residences. Danville's mechanics probably worked in the adjacent industrial area along the mill race north of Union Street where the early mills and foundries were established, or in the downtown commercial district. Also, some of the mechanics probably were foreman in the tobacco factories and prizeeries in the Mechanicsville area and the nearby tobacco district to the east. City directories and oral interviews indicate that Mechanicsville remained primarily a white middle-class neighborhood until around the turn of the century. In 1898-1899, Mechanicsville residents included businessmen, tradesmen and physicians (Finney and Finney 1899). By 1904, however, the area included working-class rental housing for tradesman, skilled and unskilled laborers, factory workers, and clerks in the nearby commercial district. They rented the single- and multi-family dwellings along Floyd Street, Ridge Street, and the east side of Monroe Street south of Floyd Street.

The social and religious institutions in the district reflect the mixed ethnic and working-class population as well. The Romanesque-Revival style High Street Baptist Church, built 1901 stands as a landmark institution in the African-American community. The Morning Star Elk Lodge, also on High Street, is a former 1887 tobacco factory that was occupied by an African-American fraternal organization in the early twentieth century. The tobacco factory was probably converted to a fraternal lodge in the 1930s. It is listed in the 1941 Danville city directory as "Independent Lodge 1479," followed by the abbreviation (c) for "colored (Hill Directory Co., Inc. 1941). Danville has a long tradition of fraternal organizations, which appears to be shared by both European-American and African-American ethnic groups. Interviews by a JMA team member with older local residents indicated that the Elk Lodge has been housed in the building about sixty years. It appears that after the decline of the tobacco industry, vacant warehouses and factory buildings in and adjacent to Mechanicsville were often reused for other purposes. For example, the High Street Baptist Church met in a vacant tobacco warehouse on the corner of Union and High streets before the church was built. Another African-American community institution was the YMCA building at the corner of High and Ridge streets. At the northeast end of the district, the early twentieth century Wesley House on Upper Street served as a community center organized by the white Methodist church community.

Commercial development associated with the Mechanicsville neighborhood occurred south of the canal along Union Street (now Memorial Drive) in response to turn-of-the-century growth of the adjacent residential neighborhood. In 1904, nine grocery stores and a meat market were situated on Union Street, interspersed with dwellings, a boarding house, and tenements (Sanborn 1904); Within the proposed Mechanicsville Historic District, commercial development was limited to two early-twentieth-century structures: a one-story brick building at 606 High Street near the corner of Floyd Street which presently houses a barber shop and salon; and Modern Food Store No. 8 on Ridge Street, recently renovated for commercial space and apartments.

World War I and World War II: 1917-1945

Mechanicsville was an ethnically mixed neighborhood through the mid-twentieth century. European-Americans were primarily white-collar and blue-collar workers, many of whom worked in the nearby cotton mills. African-Americans residing along Monroe Street were also skilled tradesman and educators, while the residents of High Street and Boisseau Alley were textile workers, laborers, and domestic workers (Hill Directory Co. 1941). Most of the lots in Mechanicsville had been developed between 1890 and 1910. The turn-of-the-century character of the neighborhood was preserved through the mid-twentieth century, as owners tended to maintain their property in good condition (Fergusson 1993; McDowell 1993). Additional development during this period included the establishment of the Sledd memorial Baptist Church – South in 1925 at the corner of Upper and Floyd streets and the Morning Star Elks Lodge in a former tobacco warehouse on High Street in the 1930s.

New Dominion 1945 - present

In 1963, the Federal Housing Redevelopment Project condemned the portion of the Mechanicsville neighborhood that extended west of Monroe Street, outside the boundary of the proposed historic district. The residential area consisted of well-preserved nineteenth and early twentieth-century residences maintained by resident owners. Nevertheless, the housing redevelopment project demolished the residences and built single-family brick ranch dwellings in their place that were sold at low cost. The new dwellings are now owner-occupied primarily by middle-class and professional African Americans. However, as a result of the redevelopment project, the neighborhood within the proposed Mechanicsville Historic District began to decline, and is now primarily rental property occupied almost entirely by African Americans, including retired resident owners and working and unemployed renters (Fergusson 1993; McDowell 1993).

District Boundary

The district is situated southwest of the Dan River Mill Historic District and northwest of the Downtown Danville Historic District. The district includes an area of approximately 14 acres and encompasses four and one half city blocks. The former YMCA building at the southeast corner of High Street and Ridge Street the northwest side of High Street between Floyd and Ridge streets forms the boundary of the district on the southeast. The boundary continues along the northeast side of Ridge Street to the corner of Monroe Street. The boundary then turns northeast and continues along the northwest side of Monroe Street to the intersection with Floyd Street. At Floyd Street, the boundary turns to the northwest and continues along the southwest side of Floyd Street to the intersection of Upper Street. At this point the boundary extends southwest along the northeast side of Upper Street to include the first four parcels on this street, including Sledd memorial Baptist Church-South and the Wesley House. From the intersection of Monroe and Floyd streets, the boundary also runs southeast along the southwest side of Floyd Street to the intersection with High Street.

Boundary Justification

The geographic and physical boundaries of the Mechanicsville Historic District are Ridge Street on the southwest and High Street on the southeast. As the name suggests, Ridge Street follows an east-to-west ridge that forms the high point of land in the southern part of the city. Early residential and commercial development was north of Ridge Street, on the slope down to the river. High Street is also situated on elevated ground. The land southeast of High Street immediately drops off and slopes down a hill to Main Street. In contrast to the residential character of the Mechanicsville Historic District, the area between High Street and Main Street is filled with old tobacco factories and warehouses as well as commercial and public buildings. The northwest and northeast boundaries of the district are determined by the change in architectural context. The resources included within the district are components related to the historic context of the neighborhood and are cohesive historic streetscapes that contribute to the integrity of the district as a distinguishable entity. In contrast, the architectural integrity of the resources in the areas excluded from the district has been compromised by major alterations, demolition, and infilling with commercial and residential buildings and parking lots.

The proposed boundary has been modified from the original 1994 proposal to eliminate the area of the 500 block of Monroe Street, as these buildings have been demolished, and to include the area of Upper Street, to include the Sledd Memorial Baptist Church and the Wesley Community House as these two resources are historically associated with the Mechanicsville neighborhood. The YMCA building at the corner of High and North Ridge Streets has also been included in the proposed district boundary as it also historically relates to the neighborhood.

Acknowledgements

The description, significance statement and historical background above were adapted and updated directly from the *Phase Ib Archaeological- Survey and Phase II Historic Architectural Survey for the U.S. Route 29 City of Danville Bridge Study* prepared by John Milner Associates, Inc. for the Virginia Department of Transportation in July 1993. This report is on file at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (PY-040).

Sponsor (Individual and/or organization, with contact information. For more than one sponsor, please use a separate sheet.)

Mr. ☐ Mrs. ☐

Miss ☐ Ms. ☒ City of Danville

(Name)

427 Patton Street, PO Box 3300

Danville

VA

24543

(Address)

(City)

(State)

(Zip Code)

blairtr@ci.danville.va.us

434-799-5261

(Email Address)

(Daytime telephone including area code)

In the event of organization sponsorship, you must provide the name and title of the appropriate contact person.

Contact person: Renee Blair, Associate Planner

Daytime Telephone: (434) 799-5261 ext. 223

Applicant Information (Individual completing form)

Mr. ☐ Mrs. ☒

Ms. ☐ Miss ☐

Alison S. Blanton

Hill Studio

(Name)

(Firm)

120 Campbell Avenue SW

Roanoke

VA

24011

(Address)

(City)

(State)

(Zip Code)

ablanton@hillstudio.com

540-342-5263

(Email Address)

(Daytime telephone including area code)

Applicant's Signature:

Alison S. Blanton

Date: 01/09/2013

Notification

In some circumstances, it may be necessary for DHR to confer with or notify local officials of proposed listings of properties within their jurisdiction. In the following space, please provide the contact information for the local County Administrator or City Manager.

Mr. ☐ Mrs. ☐ Dr. ☐

Miss ☐ Ms. ☐ Hon. ☐

(Name)

(Position)

(Locality)

(Address)

(City)

(State)

(Zip Code)

(Daytime telephone including area code)

Please use the following space to explain why you are seeking an evaluation of this district.

Would you be interested in the State and/or the Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits? Yes ☒ No ☐

Would you be interested in the easement program? Yes ☐ No ☒